(c) the number of countries with whom negotiations are on for signing such Pacts;

(d) whether Government are contemplating a ban on housemaid going to work in countries with which Indian does not have a Labour Welfare Pact; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) The number of Indian Women Household Service Workers (HSWs) in the gulf region is estimated to be around 5 lakhs.

(b) and (c) In December, 2006 the Government signed an MoU with United Arab Emirates and in April, 2007 with Kuwait. The Ministry has finalized an additional protocol with Qatar to update the 1985 agreement. MoU with Malaysia has been initialed. Efforts are on to sign the MoU with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and Yemen. There is a proposal to sign a new MoU with Jordan to replace the old agreement.

(d) and (e) The Government of India will make concerted diplomatic efforts for signing the bilateral labour MoUs with all major labour receiving countries. If diplomatic efforts fail to fructify in case of any particular country appropriate decision will be taken in the best interest of the emigrant workers.

Indian household workers in foreign countries

1293. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ministry is planning measures for the benefit of its nationals working as household workers in foreign countries, including a minimum fixed wage that would have to be paid to them by their employers;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have signed MoUs with the concerned countries;

(d) if so, with how many countries such agreements have been signed; and

(e) in what manner Government would enforce these measures on foreign nationals?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir, specific policy initiatives have been taken for better protection and welfare of our workers especially the vulnerable sections like women emigrants. The initiatives include installation of a 24/7 Helpline in the host countries, application of the age restriction of 30 years to all women emigrants having ECR passports, defining a minimum wage, compulsory attestation of employment documents for all women emigrants with ECR passports, operation of shelters for distressed emigrants, putting diplomatic pressure on persuading host countries to extend the protection of labour laws to the workers in .the informal sector and signing formal MoUs for bilateral labour cooperation aimed at protection and welfare of emigrant workers.

(c) and (d) Yes Sir, In December, 2006 the Government signed an MoU with United Arab Emirates and in April, 2007 with Kuwait. The Ministry has finalized an additional protocol with Qatar to update the 1985 agreement. MoU with Malaysia has been initialed.

(e) The MoU provide for a Joint Working Group to meet twice a year to discuss bilateral issues. This mechanism will be used to enforce the provisions of the MoU.

Contribution to citizen welfare fund

1294. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Indian immigrants who visit Gulf countries for work are contributing certain amount towards the India citizen welfare fund;

(b) if so, whether the said fund is utilized to repatriate stranded destitute Indians back to their native places and also for chemical embalming of the dead bodies and to handover them to their families;

(c) if so, the details pertaining to total fund collected during the last three years, year-wise; and

(d) the total expenditure incurred and the number of immigrants from Andhra Pradesh provided assistance?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) to (d) The requisite information is being collected and will be placed on the Table of the House.

Backward region development fund

1295. SHRI B.J.PANDA:
MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR:

Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have launched a Rs. 3,750 crore Backward Region Development Fund aimed at removing regional imbalance in development and making the rural poor self reliant;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of the districts where this scheme is proposed to be launched in Orissa indicating the details of funds that are proposed to be provided to Orissa for the purpose?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) The Backward Regions Grant Fund programme (BRGF) was launched in 2006-07. The Programme has three components, namely Special Plan for Bihar, Special Plan for the KBK districts of Orissa and the district component covered by the Backward Districts Initiative of the Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana (RSVY)